

Equalities Monitoring

Early Help and Resources

Annual Report April 2022 - March 2023



March 2024

Contents	Page
1 Introduction	3
2 Public Sector Equality Duty	4-5
3 Equalities monitoring	5 -7
4 Key issues and actions	7 - 8
5. Performance against equality objectives	8 – 9
6. Customer engagement	9 -10
7. Conclusion	10

1. Introduction

Early Help works on the premise that children, young people, and their families are offered help when needs and concerns are first identified and that the support provided improves their situation enabling sustainable progress and independence.

The early help service team include.

- **Targeted Youth Support Service** works with young people to deliver targeted 1-1 intervention and universal group activity, including sexual health clinics and LGBTQIA groups. In addition, our youth service supports young carers, completes return home conversations, has a youth council that are part of the British Youth Council and Member of UK Youth Parliament. Additional universal, group and activity-based youth provision are provided through an external provider including provision for those young people with SEN.
- **Family Hubs** – there are four multi-agency family hubs that meets the requirements of the National Supporting Families Programme to ensure the right support is available to the right families at the right time. Early Help Professionals deliver high-quality casework to create effective change to mobilise strength for families, children, and young people. The model brings a range of agencies together to deliver flexible services to children, young people, and families from four family hubs. Delivery comprises of a core and local need offer. The core offer is based around targeted one-to-one (tier 2) interventions and health delivery. 0-19 Children’s Health, Reducing Parental conflict and Job Centre staff are integrated to enable them to work and deliver services from the family hubs. Parenting programmes are delivered on a rotation basis across 3 family hubs ensuring good accessibility for families. Early Help supports the 0- 19 age range and up to 25 for young people with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- **Education Welfare Service** - The team works alongside several different professionals, schools, and families to support and improve school attendance. In addition, they track Children Missing Education, support the Elective Home Educated community whilst assessing suitability of education and support with Emotional Based School Avoidance. Child Employment and Entertainment Licencing is another element of the team ensuring the correct permits and licences are issued in agreed timescales. The Working Together to improve attendance Government guidance was published in May 2022 and went live in September 2023 although this is not yet statutory there is an expectation that it is implemented from September 2023..
- **Migration Team** – The team support and deliver on the various Government migration programmes supporting displaced people including those arriving from Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Syria, amongst other countries. The team are swift in responding to Government policy, fully utilising grant funding and in seeking opportunities to secure funding sources for projects. The team ensure that there is a focus on maintaining equality between visa schemes and different cohorts.

Our overarching aims to support the delivery of targeted early help services in Bracknell Forest are committed to:

- embedding whole family working and striving to ensure all children are safe and protected.
- engaging children and families in decisions, ensuring their voices are heard and listened to and they have positive experiences with the services we provide.

- ensuring the services and activities we deliver are inclusive and value diversity and that through our increased understanding of the barriers experienced by our service users we improve accessibility to and quality of services.

The service has several strategies and policies which underpin the work of the teams, including but not limited to:

- Early Help Strategy 2021 - 2026
- Supporting Families, Early Help Systems Guide
- Youth Strategy 2024 – 2026 (pending approval)
- Best Start in Life 2022

2. Performance against public sector equality duty

Eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.

The service operates several standards linked to timeliness, one of which is the average number of working days from receipt of the referral into the service to the day an allocation decision has been made by the Early Help duty manager. This ensures that all referrals are processed in the same manner and reporting against this target is referenced in the service's performance scorecard.

Early Help allocates funds where financial need has been assessed to enable parents/carers to attend programmes identified as a benefit to them and the family. This includes transport and childcare costs and limits some of the barriers imposed on low-income families. In addition, there is access to interpreter services for those individuals where English is not their first language.

Early Help collects Special Category Data and Personal Identifiable Information as part of its processes, and this is managed with the Information Governance Lawyer via the Data Protection Impact Assessment data processing system. This ensures that all data is processed safely and fairly and supported by a legal framework.

Along with other services within the Council, recruitment has been undertaken in the service in the last 12 months and has been blind recruitment, where characteristics such as age or ethnicity, are not shared in advance of a formal interview.

There is a zero-tolerance approach taken to any instances of discrimination, harassment, or victimisation, from staff and from customers using the service. Where there is an incident of this, action is taken immediately. The service is aware of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and this it is unlawful to discriminate, treat some people less fairly or put them at a disadvantage.

Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

All staff within the service completed training on unconscious bias, training is ongoing for staff on promoting inclusivity.

Opportunities for advancement and promotion within the team have been made available to all members, and support has been offered to those seeking to apply.

The application of the Council's flexible working policies, also enable work arrangements to be accommodating of personal and family needs, ensuring a commitment to a strong work / life balance.

More broadly work is in progress to develop the data maturity of Bracknell Forest's Early Help partnership to provide a more comprehensive overview and understanding of early help services in the community and the impact they have on improving outcomes for families, children, and young people.

The Early Help Strategy was launched in January 2023 and outlines the vision, objectives, and commitments for the wider partnership, this at its heart is rooted in advancing equality of opportunity for all.

3.Fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The leadership of the early help is committed to promoting good relations between groups within the wider community. Role modelling this to team members and ensuring an ongoing commitment to personal learning and development in this area is a priority.

The Early Help Partnership Group, reflects the services that support children and families in the borough, and seeks to bring together members to advance opportunities to support each other.

The Youth Service run a LGBTQI+ youth group who are taken part in Bracknell's first PRIDE event, supporting each other and other young people to remember the journey to equality. Young Carers are supported through youth groups where they can access information, advice, and guidance.

3. Equalities Monitoring

A range of information is collected by the early help services which helps to understand who is accessing our service and where available the outcomes for those who access the service compared to the Bracknell Forest population.

Equalities monitoring is a key requirement of internal and external commissioned providers, to ensure that service meets the needs of the communities it seeks to service. Regular reviews of the available data take place, and where appropriate action is taken.

Disability Equality – this can include physical, mental health, learning or sensory disabilities and includes conditions such as dementia as well as hearing or sight impairment.

Between April 2022 – March 2023, a total of 273 Early Help Assessments were completed with young people and families. Currently the service does not report on the primary need for the early help assessment and is exploring options to report this data for future years.

The service continues to support children, young people, and families, regardless of whether a family member has a disability. The team continue to work with colleagues in SEND to raise the profile and ensure access of early help services.

Racial Equality

2021 Census data showing ethnic breakdown of Bracknell Forest population: 86% white British or other, 7% Asian, 2.5% Black British, African or Caribbean, 3% mixed ethnicity, 1.5% other.

69% of early help assessments were for children, young people and family members who were from a white background. Further work is required to reduce the number of 'not yet obtained/known' number on ethnicity which is currently 7% and the second highest percentage. Overall, the service supports all communities across Bracknell Forest.

Gender Inequality

A higher proportion of total children, young people and families supported by early help were females, account for 53%, compared to 45% of males. Some caution needs to be applied in interpreting this as when broken down by the age range 12-18 years old 50% of females and 46% of males were supported.

In addition, each member of the household is included in the assessment, and where a male father / significant male is absent or separate from parents, they may not be included within the assessment account for the slightly higher percentage of females supported. Further work is taking place to ensure that the service increases the numbers of father / significant male's who are included.

Sexual Orientation Equality

There is some evidence nationally that young LGBTQ+ people have a higher rate of support needs, particularly around the mental wellbeing and sense of belonging. The youth service operates a weekly LGBTQI+ youth group, this is attended by young people from across the borough and seeks to provide a safe space for young people to be themselves, share experience, support one another, and gain any information and support that they may need.

The youth service supported Bracknell's first PRIDE event last year and supported young people to contribute to the day. The youth service are supporting the event this year including access to the Bracknell walk youth centre for PRIDE planning meetings.

Gender Reassignment

The National LGBT survey in July 2017 found that Trans people feel least comfortable with life than other groups and for young people transitioning while at school over 36% felt that their school was supportive of their decision. Early help services support young people and families, this includes young people who are transitioning through one-to-one support and access to resources and information.

Age Equality

According to the National Census data, in 2020 Bracknell Forest had an estimated population of 124,165, of which: 49.5 per cent (61,460) male and 50.5 per cent (62,705) female. It was estimated that 30.3 per cent (37,633) of the population were aged 0-24 years. The population of Bracknell Forest is projected to rise to 131,262 by 2043 a rise of 5.7 per cent (7,097) however, the 0-24 years age group is estimated to reduce by 1.9 per cent (2,454) which would equate to a population of 0-24 years of 26.8 per cent (35,179) overall. This families will require access to both universal and targeted support.

Data acquired over the past seven years by the council's early help service as part of the national supporting families programme, provides a view of the needs of children, young people and families in Bracknell Forest. The two highest single most common ages for children being supported were seven and 10 years old and two lowest were prebirth 0.48 per cent (10) and 17 years 3.2 per cent (75).

13 and 14 years old, were the highest and second highest age range to be support and 18 years olds the lowest age range to be supported by early help services in this reporting year. It would be expected for support to be usually provided to young people before the arrive at their 18 years birth, and this is one rationale for the low recording of 18 years old. The 0-2 years combined represents approx. 3% of the of the early help assessments completed.

Religion or Belief Inequality

2021 Census data: 48% Christian, 40% no religion; 6% no response, 1% Buddhist, 2% Hindu, 2% Muslim, 1% Sikh.

The service through assessments and direct work explores religious beliefs and diversity, ensuring that practitioners know the families that they are working with. In addition, the service supports and celebrates religious and cultural events. The service seeks to respect and explore all communities.

Pregnancy and Maternity Inequality

Support is provided for any family where a female is pregnant, through the universal offer in Family Hubs. In additional for females who may require more targeted support, tier 2 support includes the team around the family approach.

The early help team offers expectant and new mothers, a range of support which includes support from health colleagues, parenting groups and one to one support.

Marriage and Civil Partnership Inequality

2021 Census: 48.3% of people are married or in a civil partnership in Bracknell Forest – slightly higher than SE and England averages. 35.4% have never been married, 2% are married but separated, 9.4% are divorced and 4.9% widowed. 63% are living in a couple and 37% not. Overall, nearly half of Bracknell Forest households are married or in a civil partnership.

The early help service supports adults who are married, in a civil partnership or single. Several programmes are offered to support parents/carers as part of our core early help offer.

4. Key issues and actions for coming year

The proposed youth strategy will be consulted on between January 2024 and February 2024 with feedback due to be considered and reported to the Council's Executive in Spring once assessed. The feedback received will be carefully considered to ensure any impact on those with protected characteristics are fully understood and considered prior to finalising the policy.

The proposed strategy will seek to support all young people, including those with protected characteristics to advance opportunities. The strategy will also set out the wider support for all young people in the borough.

Further to this, the service is continuing to see additional demand due to national and international issues including but not limited to the increase of need, mental health needs, cost of living, and international events.

The service will review the offer of support it currently provides to young carers in Bracknell Forest, to ensure that it meets their needs and provides support to all young people regardless of their background.

Actions and mitigations planned:

The youth strategy, along with the early help strategy, is aimed to ensure equality and fairness in delivery of early help provision, as well as making it easier to understand, prioritising those with the highest need.

The current young carers offer is supporting young carers to access support, guidance, and information and will be reviewed in 2024. This includes access to a dedicated youth workspace for young carers.

5. Performance against the equality objectives

Inclusive in all we do

The primary function of the early help service is to support children and families early to resolve challenges/issues that they may be experience and support them to reach their potential.

The service supports all children and families and operate specialist groups such and services such as young carers, mental health and LGBTQI+. The service also supports with financial assistance that the Council can make available to improve living conditions for vulnerable residents in our community.

This includes support to young carers through decided professionals to offer advice, guidance and support to ensure that their needs are met and that they are able to reach their true potential.

Accessible for all

The services operate family hubs which are strategically located across the borough for all residents to access. These are all accessible. A purpose youth centre is in the heart oi the town centre.

The service has several channels for communication, including in person, visits to families' homes, universal youth work provision, group work, outreach services, a dedicated phone line for young people sexual health support and the opportunity to communicate with us via digital channels such as email. We respond to all emails, within, on average 24 hours meaning that those reaching out for help, are not waiting for longer than necessary.

Provision operates across the week, evenings, and weekends to ensure all can attend and benefit from group sessions and wider support.

Information is translated into various languages to support individuals to take part in activities and benefit from wider support. The service use interpreters to support individuals and families.

Accountable and fair

The early help service report required data on migration as required and wider early help service data is shared at relevant groups to ensure that all partners are able to contribute to discussions and hold each other accountable. The use of data supports decisions being made which are fair.

The provision of services is carried out in line with the Council's statutory duties and are in line with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Diverse and inclusive workforce

The early help service recruits staff via the Council's recruitment process which means that applications are anonymised, and that limited data on a protected characteristic is obtained prior to an interview. The early help teams are as diverse as possible and positive action in relation to attracting more males into the service takes place as appropriate.

6. Views from our customers

1. Customer engagement, consultation and learnings

As stated earlier in this report, a statutory consultation will commence in February 2024 regarding a proposed new youth strategy. This follows a period of consultation in the development of the proposed strategy.

Feedback is sought for parents, carers, children, young people, and families throughout the year on specific matters but also during and at the event of intervention to support with wider learning for the service.

The service also supports young people's participation and engages with the elected member of the UK Youth Parliament and the British Youth Council.

2. Customer satisfaction and learnings

Comments and compliments data is captured primarily by our corporate complaints team and equal opportunities data is not captured currently; however, this can be considered for the future.

Learning is taken from all complaints and shared with the relevant team and/or wider service area. This has included the service undertaking e-learning activity, development and awareness sessions and peer reviews. The services views complaints and compliments as a learning opportunity.

3. Complaints activity and learnings

Complaints data is captured primarily by our corporate complaints team and equal opportunities data is not captured currently. The service received 3 complaints and 4 compliments. Overall, the level of complaints is relatively low with only 3 complaints made with over 273 families supported through an early help assessment.

7. Conclusion

The early help services provide statutory and non-statutory services to children, young people and families in Bracknell.

All teams ensure that all children, young people and families in Bracknell have access to services and take action to promote the service offer to those with protected characteristics, whom, data suggests, are more likely to experience barriers to obtaining assistance.

The early help service does meet the needs of a diverse population in accordance with the public sector equality duty, however the service needs to continue to ensure these duties are met.

There is a gap in terms of the capture of equalities information from those seeking to provide feedback to the service via the corporate complaints process.

Early help will address the gaps in equality recording and reporting in 2024 that have been highlighted in this report.

The service will continue to secure new and support current ways of working with and engaging children, young people, and families in providing feedback channels and engagement is embedded.